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## A MORNING AT BILLINGSGATE.

It was still dark, for the iron-tongued bells of many-steepled London had not yet struck "five of the morning," when we started from our temporary domicile for Billingsgate. And how strange did the old city seem at that early hour! The unwonted solitude which prevailed contrasted, almost painfully, with the bustle and uproar which is so intimately connected with all one's associations of those thoroughfares; the darkness seemed rather to be "made visible" than dispelled by the street lamps; the universal quietness was broken only by the footfall of the policeman who slowly paced in his nightly vigils along his beat; while the thought that, within a three or four miles' circuit of where I was standing, some two millions of human beings were locked in the embrace of Morpheus, seemed scarcely possible of realisation. The moon, as she now shone forth, and anon was hid behind some dark rain-clouds which intervened, first gave a mild and feeble tint to the more prominent objects which presented themselves to view, and then seemed to make everything but the darker as she disappeared.

As we approach the great fish-market, the profound silence of the night is now and then broken by the wheels of the fishmonger's light cart, who is hastening to the same destination; and at length the hum of those who have already arrived at the scene of operations is heard, as the whole area of the market, brilliantly lighted with flaring streams of gas, which the wind tosses remorselessly in all directions, comes into view. We are early on the ground, for the fish have not yet been exposed for sale in any large quantities, and the company is at present but thin. We pass on among the tables, the fish, and the salesmen, to the front of the building, and from the back of the river we see the vessels moored alongside the shore some four or five deep, which will be left hard and fast in the mud when the tide has retired. As we glance at the cold murky waters, feel the chill of the damp breeze, and hear the clatter of the rigging and the spars, we feel thankful that it has not been our lot, as it has been that of others, to spend the past night in hauling ropes and nets, and handling cold, wet, flabby fish.

The clock strikes five, and instantly the scene changes. The fishermen and porters have been busily engaged in arranging their cargoes for delivery as soon as the market commences, and two or three minutes ago the salesmen took up their positions for beginning business. Immediately the hour of five strikes, the porters march off with their burdens to the spots which have been indicated to them by the salesmen. Let us look at one of these men, for they are a fraternity enjoying exclusive privileges, and are, in some respects, worthy of their vocation. He is a stalwart fellow, with massive lumbering limbs, dressed in a jacket which is evidently a cross between a smock frock and a tarpaulin coat, and trowsers which have been so long exposed to the weather and so bedaubed with mud that it would require minute and professional investigation to ascertain their paternity. His huge head is protected by a black shiny hat, the edges of the brim being curled up to catch the wet, while resting upon his shoulder is a heavy basket of fish. The contents of the latter are quickly deposited on the tables, and he hastens back for a fresh supply. By these means some tons of fish are speedily deposited in the market and arranged for sale.

Meanwhile business has actively commenced, and a strange spectacle presents itself. The white bellies of the turbots, whose heads and tails are tied together, shine in the lamp-light; the huge cod is quivering in its last agonies on the sloppy boards; and the blue-black piles of small live lobsters move about their bound-up claws and long feelers. The eels are making languishing efforts to escape they know not where, while one of them, being of an enterprising disposition, has got adrift and struggles furiously for liberty, setting at nought the efforts of a young amateur fisherman to retain its slippery form in his hands, and it is not till an experienced practiser seizes it by the fin and head that it is secured and restored to its companions. Piles of baskets containing herrings block up

the narrow paths; women, having the long limp tails of cod-fishes dangling from their aprons, elbow their way through the crowd; men, bearing huge hampers, force a passage onward; while others, grouped round the auction-tables, are turning over piles of soles, which slide about in their own slime, and carrying on their bargains with the salesmen. The stalls groan under their weight of fish. Cod, mackerel, plaice, haddock, soles, whiting, herrings, salmon, sprats, eels, flounders, dabs, oysters, lobsters, crabs, shrimps, whelks, mussels, cockles, and periwinkles, crowd every available spot, all being either alive or very recently dead.

By the time that the market has thus been carried on for a couple of hours, the best of the fish has been purchased by the regular fishmongers; and about seven o'clock they are succeeded by a new class of buyers—the costers. A long line of vehicles may be found in every direction converging towards the market as the centre of attraction, perhaps extending as far as the City side of the Monument, and consisting almost exclusively of hand-barrows and donkey-carts. Everybody has also obviously made a point of coming to Billingsgate in his worst clothes, and no one knows the ultimatum of a coat's durability till he has visited the market. Nor should the visitor be unduly scandalised if he finds the cold dab of the tail of a cod pressing against his cheek, or an odd sprat or two in his coat-pocket when he returns home.

Business is now at its height. The sales were at one time effected by Dutch auction, the seller putting up his goods at his own price, choosing—one may be sure, a sufficiently high item with which to begin—and gradually lowering his demand till it reached the limit which the purchasers might be prepared to offer. This plan has, however, been given up, and the usual method now adopted is that of advancing on previous biddings. Other buyers stand around while bargains are being effected, perhaps thinking that they can do better elsewhere, and then they move off to other salesmen, having ascertained the range of prices in the market. The purchasers pass rapidly from one salesman to another, in order to give the least possible price, while the money in the outstretched hand of the dealer sometimes indicates the highest amount he will pay. If the buyers were to give too high a price one day, their sales would fall off; they would buy less the next, and prices would be lowered. Concise and expressive are the terms and phraseology employed by all parties, but there is scarcely any remains of the vulgarity and abuse which were at one time so prevalent here, as to have attached a proverbial character to the lowness and profanity of the spot. "There," cries a salesman, "that lot of soles are worth your money," as he sees one of his would-be customers moving off leisurely, "none better in the market. You shall have 'em for a pound and a half-a-crown." Presently a tall porter, with a black bag full of oysters, passes staggering under his burden, muttering through his clenched teeth, "Shove on one side!" as he forces his way through the crowd. Girls ask you to buy baskets, and women with bundles of twigs for stringing herrings cry out "Ha'penny a bunch." The entire scene is one of excitement and confusion.

Salesmen and hucksters of provisions, caps, hardware, and newspapers, are bawling at the top of their voices, and purchasers are exercising their lungs to the utmost advantage in order that their biddings may be heard, till the place is a perfect Babel of competition. "Ha-a-ansome cod! best in the market! All alive! alive! alive O!"—"Ye-o-o! ye-o-o! here's your fine Yarmouth bloater! Who's the buyer?"—"Here you are, governor, splendid whiting! some of the right sort!"—"Turbot! turbot! all alive! turbot!"—"Glass of nice peppermint, this cold morning; a ha'penny a glass!"—"Here you are, at your own prices! Fine soles, O!"—"Oy! oy! oy! Now's your time! fine grizzley sprats! all large and no small!"—"Hallo! hallo here! beautiful lobsters! good and cheap! fine cock crabs, all alive O!"—"Five brill and one turbot, have that lot for a pound! Come and look at em, governor; you won't see a better sample in the market."—"Here, this way! this way! for splendid skate! O! skate O!"—"Had-had-had-had-haddick! all fresh and good!"—"Currant

and meat, puddings a ha'penny each!—‘Now, you mussel-buyers, come along! come along! come along! now's your time for fine fat muscles!—‘Here's food for the belly, and clothes for the back, but I sell food for the mind! (shouts the news-vender)—‘Here, smelt O!—‘Here ye are, fine Finney haddick!—‘Hot soup! nice peas-soup! a-all hot! hot!—‘Ahoy! ahoy here! live plaice! all alive O!—‘Now or never! whelk! whelk! whelk!—‘Who'll buy brill O! brill O!—‘Capes! water-proof capes! sure to keep the wet out! a shilling a-piece!—‘Eels O! eels O! alive! alive O!—‘Fine flounders, a shilling a lot! who'll have this prime lot of flounders?—‘Shrimps! shrimps! fine shrimps!—‘Wink! wink! wink!—‘Hi! hi-i! here you are, just eight eels left; only eight!—‘O ho! O ho! this way, this way, this way! Fish alive! alive! alive O!—‘

At the end of the market may be seen the line of oyster-boats moored alongside the wharf, whose tangled ropes and masts appear innumerable, while their decks are so crowded with men and women on board, and with the crews—who are readily distinguished by their red worsted caps,—that they seem as if they would sink under the burden. The costermongers have nick-named this row of vessels “Oyster-street,” and the scene which they present to view is full of animation. Each boat has its hold filled with oysters and sand, while some of them have a blue muddy heap of mussels divided off from the “natives.” These are disposed of by the bushel. The sailors in their striped guernseys sit on the boat-sides smoking their morning's pipe, allowing themselves to be tempted by the Jew boys with cloth caps, old shoes, and silk handkerchiefs. There are also the Dutch-built eel-boats, with their bulging, polished, oak sides, and with their holds fitted up with long tanks of muddy water, while the heads of the eels are seen breathing on the surface. When a purchaser arrives, the master Dutchman takes his hands from his pockets, and seizing a sort of long-handled landing-net, scoops from the tank a lot of eels, which he weighs in a pair of scales fitted up with a conical net-bag to receive them, and then hands them to his customer.

Of the business of the costermongers, who buy so largely in the market, a word must be said. One of them, in speaking of his business to Mr. Mayhew,\* said, “That it was formerly much better than now; he having frequently made from three to five pounds a week, while at the present time he did not clear more than fifteen shillings.” Alluding to his business, he said:—“I don't do much in lobsters. Very few speculate in them. I do more in pound crabs. There's a great sale for haporths and pennorths of lobster or crab, by children; that's their claws. I bale them all myself, and buy them alive. I can bale twenty in half-an-hour, and do it over a grate in a back-yard. Lobsters don't fight or struggle much in the hot water, if they're properly packed. It's very few that knows how to bale a lobster as he should be baled. I wish I knew any way of killing lobsters before baling them. I can't kill them without smashing them to bits, and that won't do at all. I kill my crabs before I bale them. I stick them in the throat with a knife and they're dead in an instant. Some sticks them with a skewer, but they kick a good while with the skewer in them. It's a shame to torture anything when it can be helped. If I didn't kill the crabs they'd shed every leg in the hot water; they'd come out as bare of claws as this plate.” No fewer than 60,000 lobsters and 50,000 crabs are sold annually in the streets of London by the costermongers, while they dispose of oysters to the number of some 124,000,000 a year, for which about £125,000 are paid. Of periwinkles, too, a very large amount is sold. One of the costers in the “wink business” said, that he made some twelve shillings a week by his stall. His cry was uniformly, “Winketty-winketty-wink-wink-wink-wink-wink—wicketty-wicketty-wink—fine fresh winketty-wink-wink-wink.” He confessed that he was often so sore in the stomach, and hoarse with hallooing, that he could hardly speak. Some poetical and philosophical reflections may be suggested by the experience and observation of another mem-

ber of this fraternity. Speaking of his customers, he said: “When a young woman's young man takes tea with her mother and her, then they've winks; and then there's joking, and helping to pick winks, between Thomas and Betsy, while the mother's busy with her tea, or is wiping her specs, 'cause she can't see. Why, sir, I've known it.” The gross money value of the fish purchased yearly in the streets of London has been estimated, by those in whom confidence ought, we think, to be reposed, at no less a sum than £1,460,850!

The following table will indicate the quantity and weight of some of the principal kinds of fish sold in Billingsgate-market in the course of a year:—

	No. of fish.	Pounds weight
Salmon, and Salmon-trout	406,000	3,480,000
Live Cod	400,000	4,000,000
Soles	97,520,000	26,880,000
Mackerel	23,520,000	23,520,000
Fresh Herrings in barrels	175,000,000	42,000,000
", in bulk	1,050,000,000	252,000,000
Smoked Haddock	19,500,000	10,920,000
Bloaters	147,000,000	10,600,000
Oysters	495,896,000	
Shrimps	498,428,640	
Periwinkles	304,000,000	

The increased facilities afforded by the railways and steam-boats for communication with remote districts have greatly extended the market for fish. The inhabitants of London are thus enabled to consume the cod and salmon, and other fish caught in the Atlantic, and the bays and rivers on the north-western coast of Ireland; this, in the days of sailing vessels, canals, or waggons, would have been out of the question. The fishermen who supply the London market, instead of coming to Gravesend or other parts of the Thames or Medway, put their cargoes, already packed in hampers, on board the steamboats which pass along the eastern coast, as far north as Aberdeen, and land them at Hull, whence they are conveyed to town by railway. Fast sailing cutters are sometimes employed to take provisions to the boats on the fishing-ground, and to bring back the fish taken by each.

The fish imported in 1848, and paying an import duty, were

Anchovies	161,100 lbs.
Eels	76 ship-loads.
Salmon	1,344 cwt.
Turbot and Soles	41 "
", of British taking	99,147 "

#### ST. PETER'S CHURCH, AT LOUVAIN.

St. Peter's Church, at Louvain, was originally founded by Lambert le Guerroyeur, the first Count of Louvain who attained to any celebrity; but as it was built of wood, it was burnt down by the great fire of 1130, which destroyed the greater part of the town. The present building, which stands upon the same site, dates only from the fourteenth century. Its appearance suffers from the great number of small edifices which have been erected around it, and even close to its walls, in the eighteenth century only. Before that period, and before the various accidents had occurred by which the church has been greatly mutilated, it was remarkable for standing in the centre of a great open space, and was surmounted by three towers, the central one, according to a plan still preserved in the Town-hall, reaching 536 feet in height. In January, 1604, this was blown down by a terrible storm, and in its fall it overturned the two others also. The remains of St. Peter's tower went on decreasing from day to day, so that they were obliged, in 1776, to cease ringing the bells in it; but, at last, in spite of all their precautions, every fresh breeze detached large pieces from it, and, in 1822, it was pulled down altogether.

The church is in the form of a Latin cross, and entrance is gained by three gates. There is nothing remarkable about the

\* “London Labour and the London Poor.”